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Testimony before the Connecticut General Assembly
Committee on Judiciary
in favor of
Raised Bill No. 6670

Assistant Chief Stephanie Redding
New Haven Department of Police Service
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Honorable Committee Members:

My name is Stephanie Redding and I am the Assistant Chief of the New Haven Department of Police Service. I am here today to speak in favor of Sections 4 and 5 of your Raised Bill No. 6670, An Act Concerning the Rights of Crime Victims and the Duties of the Office of the Victim Advocate.

These sections make a small but crucial change to the Connecticut Freedom of Information Act. The purpose of this change is to extend to crime victims the same privacy rights enjoyed by public employees and other persons who are the subject of personnel, medical or similar files held by public agencies.

This bill would not effect or in any way limit the vast majority of the thousands of requests for records to which the NHPD responds annually. This bill does not change Connecticut law as to what constitutes an invasion of personal privacy. This bill does not threaten the public's right of access to public records held by law enforcement agencies.

This bill simply clarifies the intention of the General Assembly in those limited circumstances where the NHPD is in possession of a record with only prurient or sensational value to the public the release of which would be highly offensive to any of us in this room today. This bill clarifies that in those limited cases the public agency may withhold the record until such time as the Connecticut Freedom of Information Commission can make a determination as to whether the standard for invasion of personal privacy has been met. The burden of proof with respect to any claim of invasion of personal privacy would continue to lie with the individual making the claim, not the public agency or the person requesting the record.

In terms of my credentials to speak on this issue I am a 23 year law enforcement veteran. I began my career as a New Haven patrol officer. I was assigned to the narcotics unit. I served in the mounted unit for five years. I was a patrol sergeant and served as district manager for one of the City's ten policing districts, East Shore. As a lieutenant I served as second in command in the patrol division. I have also served as the officer in charge of Special Investigations, where I was responsible for sexual assault cases and where I gained a great deal of experience working with victims of crimes. I was appointed Assistant Chief for Finance and Administration in 2007 and am responsible for the efficient operation of the department's Records and Property Divisions, crime analysis, neighborhood services and all matters relating to the department's budget and finances. I also served as the Acting Chief for part of 2008.

I am proud to say that the NHPD has a stellar reputation for compliance with Connecticut Freedom of Information law. We respond to thousands of requests for copies of records, photographs, accident reports, evidence logs, dispatch tapes, 911 calls, video tapes, statements, warrants, officer personnel materials, internal investigation reports, minutes of Police Commission meetings and crime statistics and data. These requests come from the media, defense counsel, members of the public, State's Attorneys, other law enforcement agencies, inmates of Connecticut correctional facilities and various State agencies, such as DCF. The requesters include members of the public who have been arrested and convicted of crimes as well as people who have been the victims of those crimes.

You have heard the State's Victims' Advocate, Ms Michelle Cruz, speak about a specific case that arose in my department. In a bizarre and horrific case of "wilding" teenagers shot video in New Haven which captured some portion of their senseless homicide of a thirteen year old girl. This video never became part of the court case against the youth, who ultimately pled guilty and are currently incarcerated. This video has never been released to the public. Only one copy of it exists and that copy is maintained in the office of the New Haven State's Attorney.

The New Haven Register has sought a copy of this video from the New Haven Police Department, which does not have it, since June 2006. Because Connecticut law currently does not provide an personal privacy exemption applicable to information contained in law enforcement records there is no exemption that could be claimed nor any mechanic under law by which the victim's mother could present her pleas for privacy to the Freedom of Information. I urge you to adopt the very limited but vital expansion to the Connecticut Freedom of Information Act contained in this bill in order to protect the privacy of people such as that mother who have been through some of life's most difficult and dreadful experiences.

At this time may I answer any questions that you might have about law enforcement records?

Thank you for your consideration.